

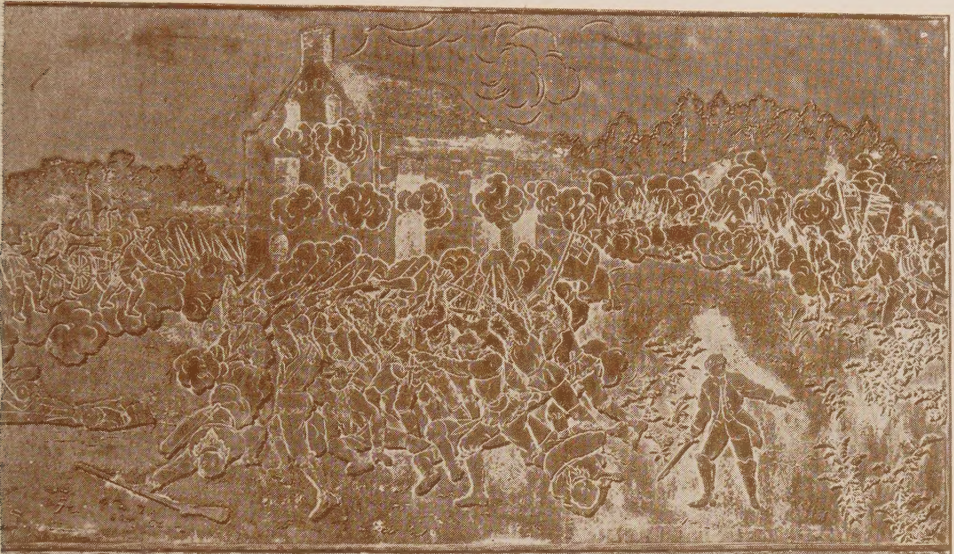
Brooklyn's Neglected
Battle Ground

Charles M. Higgins



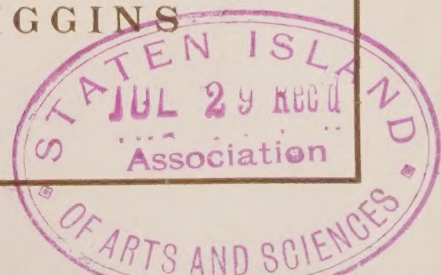
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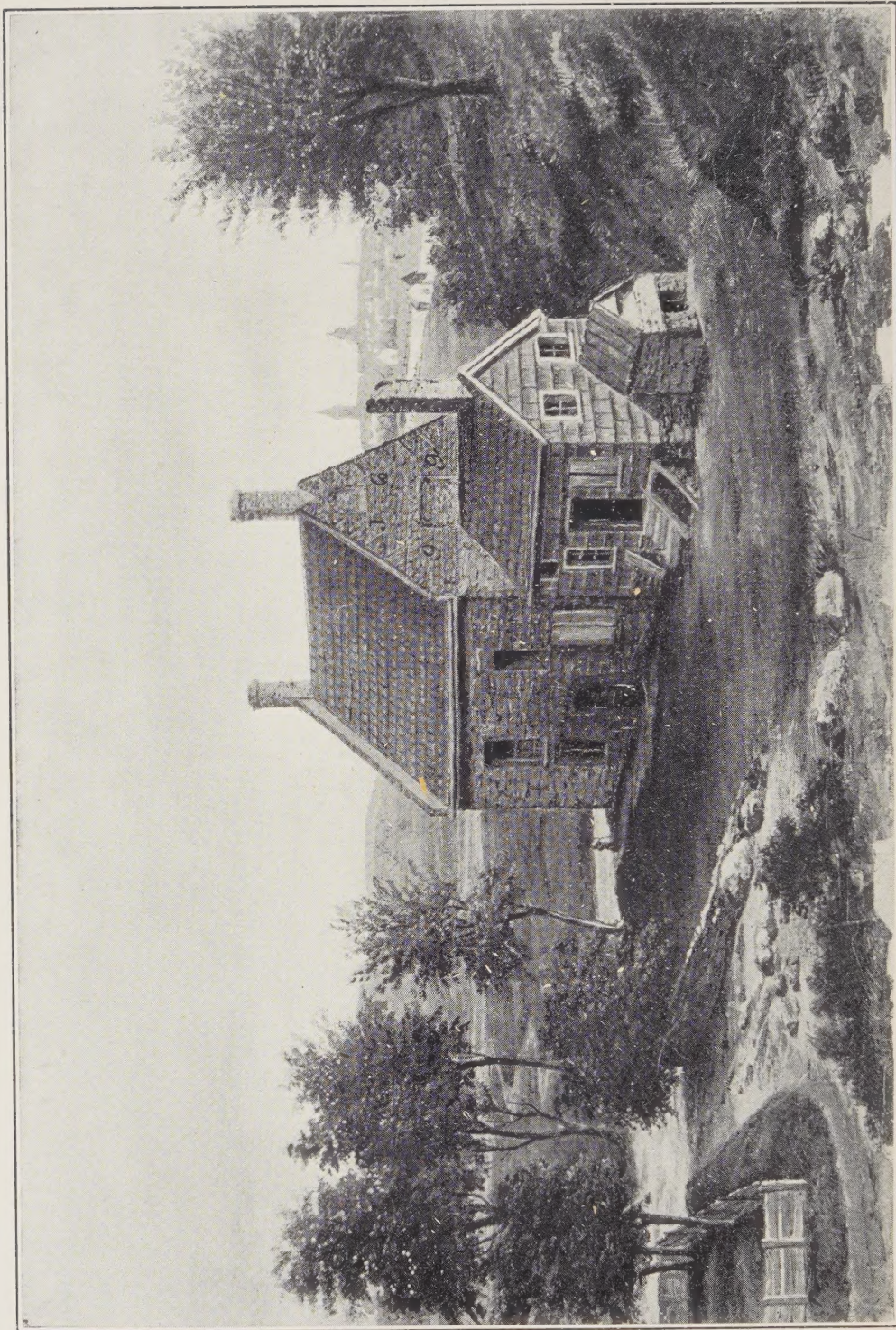
Brooklyn's Neglected Battle Ground



FIRST BATTLE AFTER THE DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE — FIRST
AS A NATION — NOW ONE OF THE MOST IMPORTANT HISTORIC SCENES
OF THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION. LORD STIRLING IN FOREGROUND

By CHARLES M. HIGGINS





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THE STONE HOUSE AT GOWANUS AND THE BATTLEFIELD OF LONG ISLAND.

First reproduction of oil painting, by Louis Grube, —1845, as frontispiece to "The Stone House at Gowanus." By Georgia Fraser.

BROOKLYN'S NEGLECTED
B A T T L E G R O U N D

BY
CHARLES M. HIGGINS

W I T T E R A N D K I N T N E R
NEW YORK 503 FIFTH AVENUE

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FOREWORD.

LOCAL history, as an investment, is not held in high favor by publishers. Therefore, it was with considerable trepidation that we undertook the production of what some may regard as Brooklyn history, but which is, really, national in significance and importance.

It was not until the publishers became, after investigation, imbued with some of the enthusiasm of the author—who was inspired first by the Grube painting, and then by the present pathetic condition of the scene depicted—that we concluded to share with her the large task of presenting the matter to the world, and this in a form which, as to literary worth and outward attractiveness, would be so strong that the subject could no longer be ignored.

Such being our attitude before the publication of *THE STONE HOUSE AT GOWANUS*, we were agreeably surprised at the reception accorded the book; and even more so by the prompt recognition of Brooklyn's duty in the matter of restoration—and this by some of those most able to arouse and to lead slumbering public sentiment in the great "City of Churches," if not of *monuments*.

It so happened, because of previous acquaintance, and his connection with one of Brooklyn's proudest institutions, as well as his editorship of its one magazine—*THE INSTITUTE BULLETIN*—that an advance copy was sent to Professor Franklin W. Hooper. His far-sighted interest in the welfare of Brooklyn was demonstrated anew by his instantaneous recognition of the situation, and by his equally prompt determination to do his share toward redeeming her reputation. Consequently, the first account of the book appeared, on January first, in the *BULLETIN OF THE BROOKLYN INSTITUTE OF ARTS AND SCIENCES*; and the second, in the *BROOKLYN DAILY EAGLE* of the following day—a striking news article.

In these two publications such space was given to text and illustrations that immediately there arose wide-spread interest, not only in Brooklyn, but throughout the country. The quotations from the BOSTON TRANSCRIPT, the PHILADELPHIA NORTH AMERICAN, and THE LITERARY DIGEST, elsewhere given, are among those which indicate the national importance of preserving and memorializing this battle site.

Two or three days after the announcement of the book, we were surprised by the receipt of an order for twenty-five copies from Mr. Charles M. Higgins, one of Brooklyn's most public-spirited citizens, whose strong and unselfish work in the receivership and reopening of the BROOKLYN BANK, after the recent panic (1907), added to his high standing in public regard. The book, therefore, had found the "right man," as we hoped it might, though expecting that it would, perhaps, require as many years as it had days.

Shortly after this, the city was electrified by Mr. Higgins' powerful appeal at the Montauk Club dinner—the permanent preservation and wider circulation of which address is the main purpose of this pamphlet.

Following this speech, Mr. Higgins sent copies of THE STONE HOUSE AT GOWANUS to many of the leading men, public officials, and to various clubs and civic organizations of which he is a member; among them the Montauk Club; the Prospect Heights Citizens' Association; South Brooklyn Board of Trade; Brooklyn League; Manufacturers' Association of New York; Merchants' Association of New York; New York Board of Trade and Transportation.

As a result of his enterprising enthusiasm, Mr. Higgins soon had the aid of the most progressive men and organizations in Brooklyn, notably the Prospect Heights Citizens' Association, in whose former president, Mr. Judson G. Wall, and its present president, Mr. William D. Niper, he found especially able and enthusiastic supporters.

Altogether, the outlook has become most promising for the accomplishment of a public work worthy of the event, the place, the City of Brooklyn, and the nation at large.

. After all, this is not solely Brooklyn's affair. It is the affair of every man and every woman in the UNITED STATES

OF AMERICA—those who are to-day enjoying the blessings no men did more to secure than did those who fought and those who died around the STONE HOUSE on the Battlefield of Long Island. Therefore, the entire burden, neither of blame for neglect nor expense for restoration, should rest upon Brooklyn. Indeed, the fact that she has shown a prompt readiness to shoulder the full responsibility indicates that there is still much of the old-time spirit of heroism resident around the historic Valley of Gowanus.

In plain words, the entire nation should aid in this movement for a suitable memorial to the past, that it may the better serve as an inspiration for the future. This memorial will not alone stand for the present and future citizens of Brooklyn, nor even for the millions yet to occupy the broad acres of Long Island; but for other millions throughout the land.

No one thinks of Bunker Hill as belonging exclusively to Boston; and so, in time, every citizen from here to the Golden Gate will feel a greater personal pride and glory in his country because there stands on Brooklyn's Park Slope, a fitting symbol of America's gratitude to Lord Stirling and his brave band, fired to almost superhuman exertion by the zeal for liberty which has ever distinguished those whose innate strength of character prompted them to seek residence on America's shores.

JAMES CALDWELL WITTER.

NEW YORK, MAY 18, 1910.



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THE OLD WILLOW TREE. — 1909.

From "THE STONE HOUSE AT GOWANUS."

Brooklyn's Patriotic Sacrilege and Historic Shame.

AN ADDRESS BY CHAS. M. HIGGINS, AT THE DINNER OF THE
PROSPECT HEIGHTS CITIZENS' ASSOCIATION, AT THE
MONTAUK CLUB, FEB. 8, 1910.

MR. CHAIRMAN, MR. MAYOR, GUESTS AND FELLOW MEMBERS:

I ask your close attention now to a matter which it seems to me should deeply concern all Brooklyn. And while some may say that my subject is a matter of mere sentiment, yet I think we must agree that, nevertheless, mere sentiment sometimes involves the deepest obligations and duties of human life. Surely the obligations of business and utility are not the only ones that bind us as civilized men, and surely, if there is any obligation in the line of sentiment which should be binding on us, it would be to fittingly honor the memory of the patriots and martyrs, who on the battlegrounds of our very neighborhood have won for us the privileges which we now enjoy here as free American citizens and the blessings of our present life of leisure and of peace.

How many of us ever stop to think or realize, however, that the ground about our very feet here is made most sacred and historic by one of the greatest or most critical battles of the Revolution? It has been called the Battle of Long Island, but the Battle of Bunker Hill might just as well be called the Battle of Massachusetts, for no part of the large military movements and the severe engagements which took place here on the memorable battle day of August 27, 1776, happened outside of the little towns which now constitute the Borough of Brooklyn, while the chief engagement, or the real battle itself, took place in the very heart of old Brooklyn at the foot of our own Prospect Heights just about a stone's throw from where we now stand, at the corner of Fifth Avenue and Third Street, so that from this hill at the Park we could have overlooked the whole conflict as we now look over into the backyards of our neighbors. This fact should, I think, bring the memory of this great historic

event very close to our hearts to-night, and make very significant what I am going to say to you.

The title of my talk to you places practically an indictment upon Brooklyn, and I think when you consider the extraordinary neglect, indifference or oversight to perform a duty to the memory of our patriot martyrs who shed their blood on the very grounds about our feet here, in what John Fiske says was the **first real battle of the War of the Revolution**, you must agree with me that the indictment is merited and the charge is none too strong, as I will soon show you.

A few of us took this matter up in this Association and in other local associations about six years ago, but we were not then able to make much impression on the indifferent ear of Brooklyn. But we now hope for better success, for this matter has been most opportunely revived by the publication of a book which I have here with me, fresh from the printer, written by a patriotic woman, whose name may be spoken with honor—Miss Georgia Fraser. And may the gods of Love and War bless her and hasten the day when she and others like her can have a bigger voice and vote in our affairs to stir up us indifferent men to a fuller realization of our duties.

The title of this book is, "**The Stone House at Gowanus, Scene of the Battle of Long Island, etc.**" I have presented this copy of the book to the Montauk Club here, so that you can look at it after the Dinner and see what it tells us about our gross neglect to the historic and sacred places under our very feet, and the sacrilege to the desecrated and unmonumented graves of our heroes buried there.

On the Menu you will find a copy of the frontispiece from this book giving a view of the **Old Stone House** in the foreground, and the old city of Brooklyn in the background—almost the entire scene of the chief engagement of the Battle of Long Island, or more properly the Battle of Brooklyn, being thus shown within the limits of this picture.

It is not necessary that I go into the full history or details of the Battle of Brooklyn, as to all the military movements and engagements on that day, but it is necessary, I think, to give you a general outline of the scene and its actions, so that you can have the main features clearly in your mind's eye.

Now through the center of the old Brooklyn there runs a valley which might be called the Valley of Gowanus, shown clearly in the middleground of the picture, and which runs nearly north and south, from Gowanus Bay at the south to Wallabout Bay at the north. Through the middle of this valley ran the Gowanus Creek, emptying into Gowanus Bay and now represented by the Gowanus Canal. On either side of this Gowanus Valley arose hills or high grounds, the hills known as Brooklyn Heights being to the west of the Valley, and the hills known as Prospect Heights being to the east of the Valley.

Prospect Heights was, of course, much the higher and overlooked both the Valley and Brooklyn Heights. In the Valley on either side of the Creek were salt marshes with upland and cultivated fields gradually sloping up to the hills on either side. On the slopes of the Valley were several springs and little brooks running into the Creek, and the marshes and Creek were dammed across at several points, forming large tidal mill-ponds which supplied power to two or more tide-mills located somewhere between what is now Third and Union Streets, and Third and Fourth Avenues. The Creek and the ponds thus divided the lands on both sides of the Valley and access was had from Brooklyn Heights to Prospect Heights by bridges over or along the mill-dams. Such was the situation and surroundings when the Battle of Brooklyn was fought on August 27, 1776.

On the higher slopes of the Gowanus Valley, just alongside the hills of our own Prospect Heights, among cultivated fields and fine trees, there arose the old **Stone House** shown in the picture, which was erected in 1699 by a good old Dutch architect, neat as wax, simple as a child, and strong as a fortress. This was occupied and used as a headquarters and fort by American soldiers, and was in particular charge on the day of the battle, of Lord or General Stirling, with the Maryland and other troops under him. The rest of the American Army was disposed as follows: Part on Governor's Island and the lower end of Manhattan, and part on Brooklyn Heights; Washington on August 27, 1776, was stationed at the west of the Valley about where Carroll Park is now, from which he had a clear view of the **Stone House** and the whole battleground of the last conflict of the day. General Putnam with a good force was stationed on



PLATE NO. 1—Scene of Battle of Long Island, Aug. 27, 1776. View from within vacant lot looking east toward corner of 2d St. and 5th Ave. Note old willow tree at back of cement houses in new lots, with palley lines running out to it. This tree indicates the location of the "Old Stone House," where our patriots fell, and is the only standing monument, reminder or marker on the sacred field to-day—"Woodman, Spare *that* Tree."

Fort Greene, but took no action in the battle, and General Sullivan had a detachment on the rim of Prospect Park, or on the edge of Flatbush, prepared to meet the advance of the enemy at the center. Lord Stirling, early on the morning of August 27, left a good garrison at the old Stone House and with the Maryland and other troops advanced along Fifth Avenue beyond Greenwood or Lookout Hill to meet the English at the nearest point at which they could strike our lines.

The English landed in great force from several ships below Fort Hamilton and Gravesend and took several days to prepare and arrange themselves on land, and then advanced in three main lines all converging to the old Stone House. The English General Grant advanced along Fifth Avenue and met General Stirling early in the morning of August 27, 1776, on the edge of the woods in Greenwood or thereabouts, and a strong fight was soon brought on there, with Stirling holding his own.

General De Heister with the Hessian troops met General Sullivan with the American soldiers on the edge of Prospect Park, somewhere near Battle Pass, and soon defeated the Americans, and took Sullivan prisoner. Cornwallis then advanced on the old Stone House and defeated the garrison and took possession there and turned its guns on the Americans. Stirling learning of this, left a portion of his troops to fight it out with General Grant, and with the bulk of his brave soldiers returned to the old Stone House, only to find it already captured by Cornwallis, its garrison defeated and its guns turned on himself. Stirling and his intrepid Maryland boys now charged the English again and again, and assisted by reinforcements sent over the mill-dam bridges from General Washington's Camp, and they with infinite labor dragged over the marshes a heavy twelve-pounder cannon and soon had the satisfaction of winning the only victory of the day, drove out the English, and again captured and used the old Stone House!

But this victory was shortlived, for the brave Americans were soon overwhelmed by the fourth and still greater division of the English under Generals Howe, Percy and Clinton, who had made a wide detour to the north, and then descended straight into Brooklyn, unopposed, from the Howard House at East New York by way of the old Fulton Street or Atlantic Avenue roads. To

prevent further reinforcements from Washington's Camp, the English now set fire to and destroyed the mills and bridges over the creeks and ponds, preventing further passage either way, and this caused the drowning of many men who tried to retreat or escape from the now overwhelming odds. Stirling and his Marylanders then made their last stand around the old house, and from 250 to 400 of them fell around this now sacred spot on that day, to say nothing of the troops lost previously. Lord Stirling, however, would not surrender to an *Englishman*, but sought out the Hessian General, de Heister, in Prospect Woods, and there surrendered. Both Sullivan and Stirling were now prisoners, and were soon put aboard the Prison Ship, but were afterwards exchanged and released.

Such, in brief, was the so-called Battle of Long Island, which would be much more properly called *the Battle of Brooklyn*, because it happened, as we might say, here in our very midst, at our feet, our very doors. That it was a very serious and critical battle is obvious, and it was equally evident that the English well knew that they had been *in a fight* that day and had been given a bitter taste of true American mettle, and knew what they would have to expect through the rest of the campaign for Liberty and Independence. And they seem to have promptly decided, after the fierce and splendid sacrifice of the Maryland boys, that they had enough of fighting for that day and some time after. And although the English were in overwhelming numbers and force, and probably could easily have trapped and defeated our whole army under Washington had they followed up the great advantage already gained, yet they seem to have been so worn out by their forced marches and the terrific combat that the handful of Americans gave them on this first day of fighting, that they concluded to take a good rest and refresh and fit themselves for the next conflict. Washington held a council of war in a mansion on Brooklyn Heights that night, and decided to make a full retreat in good order at once, and a heavy fog coming up and continuing the next day greatly assisted his design, which was completed by the 29th of August, so that when the fog lifted and the English felt that they might safely risk another fight with us—they found no enemy to meet them. He had departed to a safe distance on the mainland, and thus by the

splendid resistance made on the battlefield of Brooklyn the English power was checked at its first great assertion here, and our patriot army under Washington was saved to continue the fight to give us our liberty and independence as free American citizens, which we enjoy here to-night. And the proud Cornwallis who won his desperately fought victory over us at the Battle of Brooklyn, lived to suffer his crushing defeat and surrender to Washington five years after at Yorktown, Virginia.

Now we hear a great deal in song and story about other battles of our Revolution and other wars, and we see many great monuments and mementos rising in and around our cities to fittingly honor the heroes who fell in these great battles and to keep fresh in our minds the memory of these brave men and these great events. But who has ever heard any song or battle hymn to celebrate our famous *Battle of Brooklyn*, right at our doors, one of the most important or critical in the War of the Revolution? We have all heard the famous song, "*The Sword of Bunker Hill*," but who has ever heard in song "*The Sword of Brooklyn Heights*"? Who has ever heard a hymn on "The Battle of Brooklyn"? It is not yet written. Here, you poets at the Montauk Club, you Algernon and you Mirabeau, here is a subject worthy of your pens!

Many patriotic pilgrims go from all over the country to the distant Boston to look at its celebrated battlefield of Bunker Hill and its famous and towering monument rising above the city's roofs. But we have a greater shrine than Bunker Hill here at our feet, but as yet no marker and no monument whatever of this, our sacred and historic shrine. Here, Mr. Chairman and gentlemen, comes in my indictment of Brooklyn. Here comes in the sacrilege and historic shame of which we are guilty. And before I go further on this charge, let us compare for a moment the figures in the Battle of Bunker Hill with our *Battle of Brooklyn*, according to the Encyclopedias. The Battle of Bunker Hill was fought June 17, 1775, with 3000 English against 1500 Americans. The result was a defeat for the Americans with a loss of 1054 English and 450 Americans. The Battle of Brooklyn was fought August 27, 1776, with 15,000 English troops and 8000 American soldiers actually on the grounds. The result was also a defeat for the Americans but

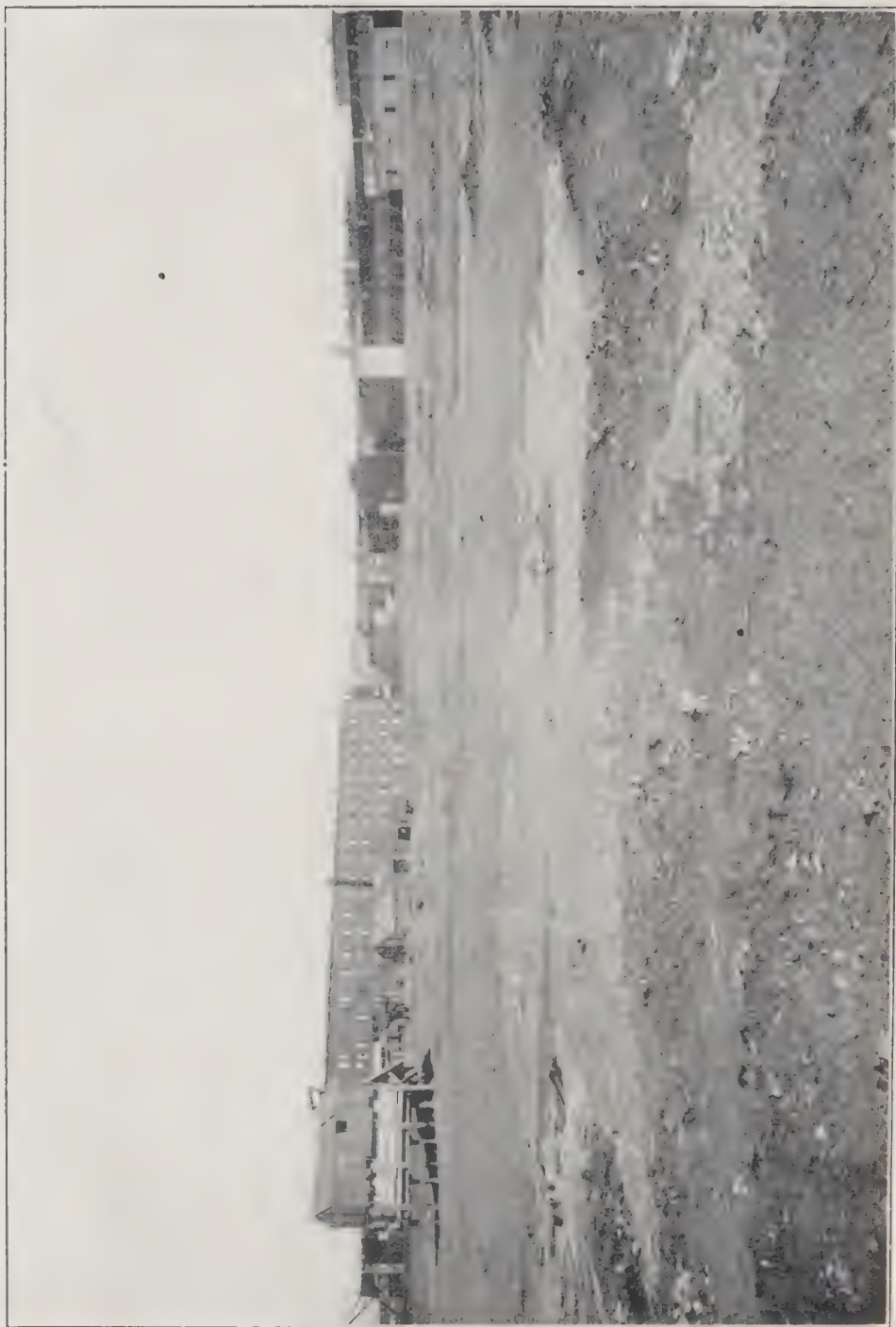


PLATE NO. 2.—Site of the Battle of Long Island, Aug. 27, 1776. This gives a more extended view from the outer edge of the battlefield (now vacant lots), from a point near 4th Avenue, between 3d and 5th Sts., looking diagonally east toward the corner of 3d Street and 5th Avenue. Note old willow tree back of angle of tenement houses at point under the hand, corner of 3d Street and 5th Avenue. Note cobblestone crusher on left, and fifth and rubbish on our sacred battlefield, now used as a dumping-ground.

with a loss of only about 400 to the English and about 1000 to the Americans. It is therefore easy to see from the data here given and other facts before stated that the Battle of Brooklyn was much the more important engagement in every military and historic sense. Surely the measure of patriot blood shed on a battlefield is a true measure of its importance in a patriotic sense, and we can see that measured by this test the Battle of Brooklyn outranks Bunker Hill as two to one. We have seen how the patriotic Bostonians have celebrated their great event in song and story and with glorious monument. But what has Brooklyn done to celebrate its greater battle and consecrate and monument its greater shrine? Do we ever see or hear of any patriotic pilgrims going to the shrine of our great battlefield and monument? Do we ever see anyone on Memorial Day bringing wreaths and flowers to deck the sacred spot in the very midst of our old Brooklyn which is or should be one of the greatest shrines in the patriotic history of our city and our nation? Oh, the historic and the patriotic shame of Brooklyn! Come with me for a few minutes to the double block a few steps from here, bounded by Third and Fifth Streets and Fifth and Fourth Avenues, and I will show you how we Brooklynites and New Yorkers treat our great historic and patriotic shrines.

Look at that old weeping willow tree rising out of heaps of ashes behind those cheap tenement houses at the corner of Third Street and Fifth Avenue, with pulley-lines reaching out to this **our sacred tree**. That tree marks the site of the Old Stone House where our heroes fell in the great historic battle of Brooklyn.

And what have we done with the sacred shrine itself—the **Old Stone House**? We have torn down its upper stories, thrown the stones into the interior, *every stone sacred and consecrated by the blood of a patriot*, and we have covered the whole glorious and sacred shrine with dirt! With dirt until every vestige of the original scene of the battlefield is obliterated. Yes, of the whole field itself we have made a dumping ground for years for the filth of our streets and we also use it now and then for a circus camp where clowns and monkeys prance over the graves of our heroes on what is perhaps the most sacred shrine of patriotism in our

whole city. This is a specimen of Brooklyn's patriotic sense, of its historic sense, and its patriotic gratitude. Have I not, therefore, gentlemen of this Court and Jury, now carried my indictment home to Brooklyn, and must not your verdict be *Guilty*, without leaving your seats?

If our enemies and haters had deliberately designed to desecrate our sacred and holy places, to execrate the glorious deeds of our heroes, to obliterate all location and memory of them, they could not have done worse than we ourselves have actually done on this, our famous battleground of Brooklyn.

Mr. Mayor of our greatest city, are you going to stand for any further continuation of this shame? Mr. President of our greatest Borough, are you going to stand any longer for this condition of affairs? Mr. Kennedy, our best Park Commissioner, can you stand for this shameful dumping ground where we should have a sacred Park? * Men of Brooklyn, can you any longer stand for this local disgrace?

And now, Mr. Public Service Commissioner, let me say this to you: In a few days your Fourth Avenue Subway diggers will be digging through and across our sacred battlefield. Let us now ask you to instruct them to look wistfully for the relics of our buried heroes, to handle them tenderly and preserve them carefully till we can give them fitting honor.

I have said, I think, that we had no memorial or marker whatever except the old willow tree on the site of the battlefield. There is one slight exception to this, however, which in itself is even *discreditable* to Brooklyn. On the wall of the tenement house, corner of Third Street and Fifth Avenue, will be found a bronze tablet giving a record of the gallant fight by the Maryland soldiers around the old **Stone House** on the battle day of August 27, 1776. But this marker would hardly be noticed by the average passerby along the sidewalk unless his attention was called to it, and what makes it actually disgraceful to us is that this meager marker was not put there by the people of Brooklyn but by the people of Maryland, or by the national society known as the Sons of the Revolution.

*It should be called "Battle Park" and include a splendid monument with the "OLD STONE HOUSE" resurrected from beneath the sod and restored as a Museum of Colonial and Revolutionary Relics, with a Children's Playground at a suitable distance.—C. M. H.

The only real marker or monument on the field is, therefore, after all, the old weeping willow tree; fitting indeed that it should be a *weeping willow*, for it seems to be the only thing that has wept over the graves of our heroes for all these years and wept also for our neglect and disgrace in this matter. Here surely is **Brooklyn's Tree of Liberty**, greater to us than the Charter Oak of Hartford. Oh, Mr. Park Commissioner, won't you tenderly take some shoots or slips from this sacred tree to your propagating houses and raise from them hundreds of scions which can be planted as little trees of liberty in every park and public square of our city and which can be given to our school children on Arbor Days to plant as a memorial of the heroes who fought for our liberty at our own doorsteps and as a better lesson in patriotism and devotion for our rising generation to follow than our fathers seem to have given to us?

Mr. Chairman, my Druid ancestors have, I think, made me a *worshipper* of trees: Trees have *souls* and they ever speak to us out of the dead past into the living present. I have visited this old willow tree and have listened to its complaint. I have taken down what it has said to me, and now give you this message from it. Listen to what it says to you: "My roots grow out of the bosoms of buried patriots. My growth has been fertilized by the blood of your departed heroes who fell beneath my shade to give you Liberty and Independence. Year after year I have raised my now tottering trunk above the graves of these buried heroes, the only monument to their memories. Every year for more than a century I have moaned and groaned, unheeded by you, with every sighing wind that has blown over this battlefield, at the indignities that your neglect has placed upon this sacred spot and upon these glorious men buried here. I have wept, as only I can weep, for more than a century of years, have wept over the desecrated graves of these forgotten heroes at *the damnable sin of neglect of you and your fathers and your grand-fathers* to provide a fitting memorial of the sacrifice which these heroes made here to give you Liberty and Independence. And I shall continue to weep and groan until your duty is fulfilled to them. I shall continue to be their memorial and monument until you erect a better one, and then, and only then, shall I be content to molder and mingle with their sacred dust."



PLATE NO. 3.—Site of Battle of Long Island, Aug. 27, 1776. Tenement house at N. W. corner 3rd St. and 5th Ave. Note French flag on wall. Would not be noticed by passerby on sidewalk unless attention was called to it. Only memorial as site of great battle, and this was put up as 1861 by people of Maryland for the Society of the Sons of the Revolution and not by the people of Brooklyn.

Oh woodman! Spare **THAT** tree,
Touch not a single bough;
For in youth it sheltered thee—you heroes,
And we'll protect it now.

And now, having said my say, I ask you this: Men of the old city of Brooklyn, men of the great City of New York, in the presence of our beloved Mayor, I ask you: What are you going to do about this? What are you going to do to atone for our patriotic sacrilege and to wipe out our historic shame?

In conclusion I shall ask the Toastmaster to propose this toast to our heroes of the Battle of Brooklyn:—

“To the memories of our heroes who fell in the famous Battle of Brooklyn, and to the hope that we soon may atone for our long neglect by erecting a fitting memorial to them on the sacred field of their sacrifice.”

“Its fate is like that of the Hancock House in Boston, and within a few years it will be too late to restore this monument of Colonial and Revolutionary times.”

BOSTON EVENING TRANSCRIPT.

“‘The Stone House at Gowanus’ bears the same relation to that bitter struggle that the Chew Mansion did to the Battle of Germantown. It is even more important as a national relic.”

PHILADELPHIA NORTH AMERICAN.

“The author of this excellent account of the Stone House declares that it would be possible to uncover the spring and the brook, and to unearth and set up the Old House practically in its integrity.

“That something of the kind should be done is strongly urged—this restoration becoming part of a scheme to create, in that neighborhood, a small park as a memorial of the battle.

“It is much to be regretted that the house was demolished. Had the American Scenic and Historic Preservation Society been then in existence, it seems unlikely that its destruction would have been permitted.”

THE LITERARY DIGEST.

Site of the Battle of Long Island—History and Present Status of the Efforts to have it Acquired by the City of New York.

THE site of the chief engagement of the Battle of Long Island, really the *Battle of Brooklyn*, fought August 27, 1776, consists of two city blocks, bounded on the north by Third Street, on the south by Fifth Street, on the east by Fifth Avenue, and on the west by Fourth Avenue. It is almost all vacant lots except along the Fifth Avenue front, where there are a number of small and inexpensive buildings. The assessed valuation of the land alone is about \$260,000 and of the land and buildings about \$300,000. The Litchfield estate owns about nine-tenths of the property and the rest of the property is owned by about five or six owners holding small parcels all along the Fifth Avenue front. It is believed that the property can be purchased by the City for a fair present valuation of about \$500,000 to \$550,000.

One of the first efforts in recent times to bring about the purchase of these historic grounds for patriotic and historic reasons as a monumental reservation to commemorate the great Battle of Long Island and to also serve the purpose of a Public Park and Playground, was inaugurated in October, 1904, by the South Brooklyn Board of Trade and the Prospect Heights Citizens' Association. These two bodies are local civic associations of Brooklyn nearest to the site of this historic battleground, and have a large membership and considerable influence and activity in local civic affairs. Judge Gaynor has been Vice-President of the latter Association since its organization and until his inauguration as Mayor.

Following the agitation started by the two civic associations named for the purchase of these historic grounds, the Local Aldermanic Board of the Prospect Heights District on November 30, 1904, adopted resolutions in formal legal manner, as required by the City Charter, recommending the purchase of these grounds by the City for park purposes. "This recommenda-

tion of the Local Board of the Aldermanic District, however, was later on rejected by the Special Committee of the Board of Estimate, as shown by the following official record and report which herewith follows:

MEETING OF THE BOARD OF ESTIMATE AND APPORTIONMENT,
JUNE 14, 1907.

Laying Out Park Bounded by Fourth and Fifth Avenues,
Third and Fifth Streets, Brooklyn.

The Comptroller asked unanimous consent for the present consideration of a report from the committee to which this matter was referred on April 19, 1907.

No objection being made, the following report was presented:

June 3, 1907.

TO THE BOARD OF ESTIMATE AND APPORTIONMENT:

Gentlemen—At a meeting of the Board held on the 19th day of April, 1907, there was referred to a committee consisting of the Comptroller, the President of the Board of Aldermen and the President of the Borough of Brooklyn, the matter of laying out of a public park bounded by Fourth and Fifth Avenues, Third and Fifth Streets, in the Borough of Brooklyn. Attached to the papers was a copy of a report of the Chief Engineer of the Board of Estimate and Apportionment, Mr. Nelson P. Lewis, in which it was shown that the assessed valuation of the property is \$233,500.

The City already has under condemnation proceedings a large tract of land on Fourth Avenue, between First and Second Streets, upon which there are taxes due the City amounting to almost as much as the property is worth, and also across the street on the north side of First Street, there is an additional tract of land under similar conditions in regard to the amount due the City for taxes, which is being acquired for playground purposes.

The proposed park is within four blocks of Prospect Park, which is located at Ninth Avenue and which has an entrance on Third Street.

The present financial condition of the City is such that your Committee cannot recommend the laying out on the map of this public park bounded by Fourth and Fifth Avenues, Third and

Fifth Streets. We, therefore, recommend that the resolution adopted by the Local Board of the Prospect Heights District, Borough of Brooklyn, on November 30, 1904, recommending to the Board of Estimate and Apportionment a change in the map of the City by laying out as a public park the two blocks bounded by Fourth and Fifth Avenues, Third and Fifth Streets, be rejected.

Respectfully submitted.

H. A. METZ, Comptroller.

P. F. MCGOWAN, Pres. B. of A.

BIRD S. COLER, Pres. B. of B.

The following resolution was then adopted:

RESOLVED, That the Board of Estimate and Apportionment of the City of New York hereby rejects the resolution adopted by the Local Board of the Prospect Heights District, Borough of Brooklyn, on November 30, 1904, recommending the laying out of a public park, bounded by Fourth and Fifth Avenues, Third and Fifth Streets, Brooklyn.

Affirmative: The Mayor, the Comptroller, the President of the Board of Aldermen and the Presidents of the Boroughs of Manhattan, Brooklyn, the Bronx, Queens and Richmond.—16.

In these former official proceedings little or no stress, however, seems to have been laid on the fact of the great historic and patriotic reasons for acquiring these grounds as being the site of one of the most important or critical battles of the War of the Revolution, which feature appears to have been largely lost sight of in the proceedings before the City officials and stress laid chiefly on the desirability of acquiring these grounds for mere park purposes only.

When we consider, however, that we have here a most sacred piece of ground right in the heart of the present Borough of Brooklyn, soon to be the greatest borough in our whole city, on which the first battle of the American people as a Nation was fought—the first battle after the Declaration of Independence, we have a much greater reason for acquiring this site than for any mere park purpose alone. That this Battle of

Brooklyn was a far more important and portentous event than either Concord, Lexington or Bunker Hill—great and significant and sacred to all Americans as they were—will be obvious on a little consideration, for here the entire Army of Washington was saved from capture by an English force three times its number, and here the life of our young nation was saved literally at its very cradling! Surely this is distinction enough to confer on any spot the greatest historic and patriotic importance: And if this distinction does not make this spot to the people of Brooklyn and New York a shrine most valuable and sacred in every historic and patriotic sense, we would like someone to point out any other spot in the whole city or State, or even in the nation itself, of greater distinction or importance as a patriotic or historic shrine: And it of course follows that the greatest historic and patriotic duty rests on the city to acquire this site as a monumental reservation to fittingly honor the memory of the heroes and patriots who fell there to save this nation at its very birth and give us the blessings of liberty and independence which we would certainly have lost if these heroes had not made their great and almost forgotten sacrifice for us on that never-to-be-forgotten battle day of August 27, 1776, right in the heart of our old Brooklyn. Brooklyn and New York can therefore no longer neglect the duty which we owe to the memory of these heroes, and to the great patriotic and historic event here enacted, and to do so would surely make us out as being barbarians to every instinct of patriotic gratitude and historic appreciation and fittingly disgrace us in the eyes of every city, state and nation on the face of the earth.

It is time, therefore, that the citizens of Brooklyn and New York make amends for their extraordinary oversight and neglect of a binding historic and patriotic duty by now taking steps for the immediate purchase of these historic grounds as a monumental reservation and public park, and in due time fittingly restoring old landmarks thereon and erecting a grand and suitable battle monument by City, State and National action.

While this site has, of course, the greatest *local* historic and patriotic significance, yet its significance is far too great to be merely local, as it has in fact **National significance** and interest in the fullest sense, for, as we have already said, here the first battle

of the **American Nation** was fought, and here the Nation itself was saved **at its birth**.

The Brooklyn League, South Brooklyn Board of Trade, and Prospect Heights Citizens' Association have passed resolutions for the purchase of these historic grounds.

The following are the resolutions passed by the

PROSPECT HEIGHTS CITIZENS' ASSOCIATION.

Resolutions for acquiring the ground site of the Battle of Long Island by the City of New York for a Monumental Reservation and Public Park.

Passed unanimously by the Board of Trustees of the Prospect Heights Citizens' Association, at a regular meeting of the Board, April 6, 1910.

WHEREAS, Brooklyn has within our own immediate neighborhood of the Prospect Heights District one of the greatest patriotic and historic sites in the whole City of New York. This locality is the site of what is known as "**The Old Stone House at Gowanus**" at the corner of Fifth Avenue and Third Street, Brooklyn, and including the double block bounded by Third and Fifth Streets and Fourth and Fifth Avenues, now chiefly vacant lots. On this ground and surrounding the old Stone House, which is now buried about sixteen feet below the grade of the present streets, was fought the Battle of Long Island on August 27, 1776, which was one of the most critical in the War of the Revolution, more important in a military, historic and patriotic sense than the Battle of Bunker Hill, because it held in check the great army of the British, outnumbering ours three to one, and enabled Washington to make a full and orderly retreat, and thus saved not only the American Army but we might say our nation itself at its very birth, as this battle was the **first conflict after the Declaration of Independence**; and,

WHEREAS, The Prospect Heights Citizens' Association notes and regrets the extraordinary oversight and neglect of the people of Brooklyn in particular, and of New York in general, both in the present and past generations, to reserve or monument in any proper way the site of this great Battle of Brooklyn, which was of such great local interest and of such real national im-

portance in both a historic and patriotic sense ; and it is therefore now

RESOLVED, That as an urgent patriotic and historic duty incumbent on the entire city, we recommend the purchase by the City of the site of what is known as the Old Stone House of Gowanus, including the two city blocks before described, which was the site of the chief engagement of the historic Battle of Brooklyn and the point towards which all the English lines converged on that day of battle, and which is now located within the heart of our Borough of Brooklyn. And it is further

RESOLVED, That the ground referred to be used in part for a monumental reservation and in part as a public park or playground and that it be called "Battlefield Park." That the Old Stone House be restored and that steps be taken, in due time, for the erection on this ground of a grand Battle Monument by combined City, State and National action. And be it further

RESOLVED, That we suggest to each of the owners of these lands that they owe a patriotic and historic duty to themselves and every other citizen to arrive at a fair, just and true valuation of these grounds, which will be mutually satisfactory to the city and to themselves and lead to the early purchase by the city, without unnecessary cost, expense or delay ; and that such agreement, free from any merely sordid considerations, on the part of these owners, with the city, would be a most honorable and public-spirited act, worthy of the great historic and patriotic duty which all citizens of this great city owe to the memory of the thousand or more heroes of the Revolution who fell on these sacred battlegrounds to give us the blessings which we now enjoy of Liberty and Independence as free American citizens.

RESOLVED, That copies of these resolutions be sent to each of the owners of these historic grounds, to the Mayor of the City, to the Borough President, to each member of the Board of Estimate, to the Board of Aldermen, and to the public press.

The above Resolutions have been referred to the Board of Trustees, with full power, and they will co-operate with the Committee of The South Brooklyn Board of Trade to bring about the purchase by the City of these historic grounds at an early day if possible.

BROOKLYN'S PATRIOTIC SACRILEGE AND HISTORIC SHAME

THE SOUTH BROOKLYN BOARD OF TRADE.

The South Brooklyn Board of Trade passed similar resolutions and placed the matter in the hands of the following Committee:

CHARLES M. HIGGINS, Chairman;

HON. WILLIAM M. CALDER, Member of Congress;

CHARLES H. EBBETTS, President Brooklyn Baseball Club;

JOHN E. GAVIN, Ex-President South Brooklyn Board of Trade;

F. C. SAUTER, Real Estate;

HON. MICHAEL FURST;

HON. MICHAEL E. BUTLER.

F. W. H. NELSON, President, *ex-officio*.



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